



Review Article

Exploring Forgiveness as an Indispensable Overlooked Virtue of Mankind

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ABSTRACT

Forgiveness is an intentional and voluntary act of being free from resentment, grievance and the desire for revenge in order to foster compassion, harmony and peace. Despite its significance, forgiveness is often overlooked in contemporary discourse. This article aims to explore the forgiveness as an indispensable overlooked virtue of mankind. An exploratory research design was employed to guide the inquiry. Qualitative secondary data were collected from journal articles and books. The thematic analysis was applied based on the research focus of exploring. The secondary sources underwent a comprehensive review of theoretical literature. The findings from the comprehensive theoretical literature revealed that forgiveness has been consistently portrayed as a transformative moral force that nurtures empathy, reconciliation, inner peace, moral resilience, and social harmony. The findings reveal that forgiveness stands as a central virtue necessary for sustaining individual well-being and collective humanity. This study will benefit students, teachers, scholars, and readers in the future by deepening their understanding of forgiveness as a critical moral value, and it provides them with a meaningful framework in the present to appreciate forgiveness as an essential guide for ethical and compassionate living.

Keywords: Empathy, Forgiveness, Mankind, Reconciliation, Resilience, Virtue

Introduction

Human beings hold diverse virtues which create reconciliation, resilience, harmony and peace in the world. Forgiveness, which is one of the requisite virtues, is normally overlooked in these present surroundings. It is a complex and multifaceted virtue, and is an indispensable aspect of human existence. It is considered an act of taking no revenge (Gull & Rana, 2013). A virtue is a quality or trait considered a moral or ethical good, reflecting positive and commendable attributes in an individual's character or conduct. It signifies behaviour or

attitudes that show high moral standards; a particular good quality (Hornby, 2010).

After a misbehavior, forgiveness involves a set of positive, socially motivated changes in an individual (McCullough, 2001). Often overshadowed by other virtues, it plays a pivotal role in fostering compassion, healing wounds, and promoting overall well-being of mankind. Mankind refers to the collective human species, encompassing all individuals of the human race and their shared attributes, experiences, and history. It simply indicates the human race (Schumann & Walton, 2022).

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In this article, the psychological, social, and emotional dimensions of forgiveness have been examined by shedding light on its transformative potential. In the intricate array of human virtues, forgiveness stands as a luminous thread, weaving through the fabric of our existence. As the canvas of life unfolds with its myriad challenges, transgressions, and conflicts, the virtue of forgiveness emerges as both a profound necessity and a regrettably underrated force. The process of forgiveness in psychotherapy involves both letting go of resentment toward the offender and replacing the resentment with mindful awareness and empathy (Menahem & Love, 2013). Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another, experiencing a sense of connection and emotional resonance. It is a mode of understanding that specifically involves emotional resonance (Halpern, 2003), and the ability of understanding another person's feelings, experience, etc. (Van Dijke et al., 2020).

Forgiveness, at its essence, is a transformative and cathartic process that involves the deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment and animosity towards an individual or a group. It is not merely a passive acceptance of wrongs but an active, intentional choice to liberate oneself from the shackles of bitterness. Embedded within the human experience, it has been a recurring theme in philosophy, religion, and literature, yet its significance is often eclipsed by more visible virtues.

It reveals its societal impact as a force capable of healing collective wounds. The truth that

forgiveness is not a sign of weakness but a manifestation of collective strength becomes evident in the resilience of communities that choose reconciliation over revenge. Resilience is the capacity to bounce back from adversity, adapt positively to challenges, and endure setbacks with strength and flexibility. It is the ability of people to feel better quickly after something unpleasant (Malekpour, 2025). Similarly, reconciliation is the restoration of friendly relations and the resolution of conflicts, fostering harmony and understanding between individuals or groups. It is the process of making it possible for two different ideas, facts, etc. to exist together without being opposed to each other (Jones, 2023).

Societies that embrace forgiveness foster environments of empathy, understanding, and communal healing, proving that the act of pardoning is not only a personal virtue, but a social imperative. The cultivation of forgiveness requires a conscious effort at both individual and societal levels. Educational programs, therapeutic interventions, and community initiatives can play a crucial role in promoting forgiveness as a virtue. Emphasizing the transformative power of forgiveness in various contexts can contribute to a more compassionate and interconnected world.

The objective of this study is to explore the multifaceted dimensions of forgiveness as an indispensable yet overlooked virtue of mankind.

The study holds significant standing in unraveling the potential for healing, societal harmony, and personal well-being by shedding light on the transformative power of

forgiveness in fostering empathy, reconciliation, and emotional resilience, and offering valuable insights that can contribute to the cultivation of more compassionate and understanding communities.

While numerous research studies have extensively explored virtues like honesty, compassion, integrity, courage, generosity, justice, humility, respect, gratitude, and responsibility, this article uniquely underscores the often-overlooked virtue that is forgiveness as a central focus of study.

This study employs a delimitation strategy, restricting the inclusion of nominal secondary data to sources such as books, and journal articles. The explored virtues of forgiveness have been analyzed. Furthermore, it acknowledges that the subjective nature of forgiveness and diverse cultural interpretations could impose limitations on the universal applicability of its perceived worthiness.

This study gets engaged in a comprehensive exploration of forgiveness as a virtue of mankind. It explores its multifaceted aspects to contribute valuable insights that can foster a deeper understanding of its significance across psychological, social, and cultural domains.

Literature Review

This article includes the reviews of theoretical literature of the following terms:

Virtues

Virtues are positive qualities or attributes that are considered morally good and desirable (Lavy, 2020; Lamb et al., 2021). They are often seen as standards of behavior that reflect high

moral and ethical standards. They guide individuals in making choices that contribute to personal and collective well-being, and they are often associated with traits that promote positive interactions and relationships within society (Carlo & Padilla-Walker, 2020; Nargiza, 2022). Some common virtues include: honesty, integrity, compassion, courage, justice, generosity, humility, forgiveness, respect, responsibility, gratitude, etc. This article deals with forgiveness as a crucial virtue.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness has long attracted the attention of scholars, philosophers, and theologians across cultures and eras for its moral, psychological, and interpersonal significance, yet it remains insufficiently emphasized in contemporary discourse. It is generally viewed as a response extended to remorseful offenders (Haber, 1990) and defined as surrendering the right to retaliation after an injury (Pingleton, 1989). Research consistently shows that forgiveness reduces negative emotions, fosters resilience, and enhances life satisfaction by enabling individuals to relinquish resentment and anger (Berry et al., 2005; Brown, 2003). Interpersonally, forgiveness promotes reconciliation by repairing relationships within families, communities, and society at large (McCullough et al., 1998). From psychological perspectives, forgiving individuals experience less anger, rumination, and revenge-seeking tendencies, thereby strengthening social bonds and emotional well-being (Worthington & Scherer, 2004; Allemand et al., 2008). Studies further highlight its role in conflict resolution,

where forgiveness becomes a pathway to rebuilding trust and cohesion (McCullough, 2000; Pargament, 2011). Cultural and religious traditions enrich this discourse: Christianity frames forgiveness as a divine mandate, while Buddhism regards it as a means of liberation from suffering. The primary function of forgiveness is to down-regulate negative affect and alleviate stressful reactions (Brown, 2003; Worthington & Scherer, 2004), with evidence linking hostility to harmful health outcomes such as coronary heart disease and early mortality (Miller et al., 1996). In organizational and societal contexts, forgiveness serves as a restorative mechanism for healing, reconciliation, and improved relational dynamics (Bradfield & Aquino, 1999; Tutu's post-apartheid reconciliation efforts). The process of forgiveness unfolds over time and involves recognizing harm, cultivating self-compassion, processing anger, rebuilding relational trust, and viewing the offender with complexity (Bass & Davis, 1994; Davenport, 1991; Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1996). Forgiveness also supports creativity, reduces guilt, improves physiological well-being, and contributes to a meaningful life (Stone, 2002; Wuthnow, 2002; Everett et al., 2007; Huang & Enright, 2000; Novitz, 1998). Individuals who forgive report greater happiness, optimism, environmental mastery, and self-acceptance (Hill & Allemand, 2011; Krause & Ellison, 2003; Maltby et al., 2005; Sastre et al., 2003). Psychological research confirms strong links between forgiveness and reduced anxiety, stress, and depression (Bono et al., 2008; , Orth et al.,

2008). Forgiveness transforms interpersonal conflicts into opportunities for growth, strengthens relationships, and supports social harmony (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Thompson et al., 2005). Experimental studies further demonstrate the positive association between forgiveness and subjective well-being (Karremans et al., 2003; Worthington et al., 2007). Forgiveness tends to increase with age (Enright et al., 1989; Mullet & Girard, 2000) and varies by gender, with women benefiting from forgiving others and men from forgiving themselves (Toussaint et al., 2008). Spirituality also enhances positive psychological outcomes tied to forgiveness (Levenson et al., 2006). Gratitude, love, and forgiveness are identified as key contributors to human happiness and subjective well-being (Diener, 2000; Emmons, Robert, & McCullough, 2003; Duckworth et al., 2005). Forgiveness strengthens interpersonal and community resilience, improves physical health (Thoresen et al., 2000), and supports stable, supportive relationships (McCullough, 2000). Psychological models, such as Enright's (1996), frame forgiveness as a multi-stage process of uncovering, deciding, working, and deepening, while theoretical studies connect forgiveness with subjective well-being (McCullough, 2000; Toussaint & Webb, 2005). Despite its benefits, forgiveness is sometimes perceived as a sign of weakness due to fears of vulnerability, cultural norms prioritizing justice, concerns about exploitation, and misunderstandings that forgiveness condones wrongdoing. Nevertheless, educational, therapeutic, and community initiatives continue

to highlight its transformative potential as a virtue essential for personal well-being and collective harmony.

Literature on forgiveness reveals its profound implications for individual, interpersonal, and societal well-being. As we navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world, understanding and promoting forgiveness emerges not only as a scholarly pursuit but as an imperative for fostering a more compassionate, interconnected, and harmonious global community. Future research should aim to bridge gaps in our understanding of forgiveness, exploring innovative approaches for its cultivation and application in diverse cultural and social contexts.

How to Cultivate Forgiveness

Cultivating forgiveness can enhance emotional well-being, relationships, and physical health (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). Strategies for developing forgiveness include releasing anger and resentment, as suppressing emotions can increase stress (Worthington, 2006; Toussaint et al., 2015). Understanding others' behavior within their own experiences and practicing empathy can reduce anger and promote forgiveness (McCullough, 2001). Forgiveness requires a conscious decision and commitment, which provides closure and advances the process (Worthington, 2006; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). Replacing negative thoughts with compassionate ones is also beneficial (Toussaint et al., 2015). Self-forgiveness, which involves accepting one's own mistakes, is crucial for alleviating guilt and shame (Hall & Fincham, 2005). Seeking

professional help, such as Forgiveness Therapy, can offer structured support (Wade et al., 2014; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). Overall, cultivating forgiveness is a gradual process involving understanding, empathy, commitment, and professional guidance if needed.

Benefits of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a powerful tool for personal growth and has significant mental, emotional, and physical health benefits. Choosing to forgive can alleviate the burden of resentment and anger, improving well-being and relationships (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). It is associated with reduced anxiety, depression, and psychological distress (Toussaint et al., 2015), and fosters feelings of peace, hope, and life satisfaction (Wade et al., 2014). Forgiveness can enhance self-esteem, reduce PTSD symptoms, and lower stress hormone levels, thereby reducing overall stress (Worthington et al., 2007). It also promotes empathy, understanding, and compassion, which are vital for conflict resolution and trust rebuilding (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). Forgiving individuals often experience improved relational satisfaction and deeper emotional connections (McCullough, 2001), along with open communication and mutual respect, which are crucial for strong relationships (Worthington et al., 2007). By learning to forgive, people navigate difficult emotions and move forward without being overwhelmed by negativity (Wade et al., 2014). It aligns with religious and philosophical teachings that value mercy and letting go of

grievances, fostering spiritual renewal and inner peace (Toussaint et al., 2015; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). Forgiveness sets a positive example, promotes understanding, and can help reduce social tensions and encourage community well-being. Thus, embracing forgiveness can lead to improved health, stronger relationships, and a more peaceful, fulfilling life.

Materials and Methods

An exploratory research design was employed to investigate the dimensions of forgiveness as an indispensable yet overlooked virtue of mankind. This design was considered appropriate for the study because it allowed an in-depth examination of philosophical, emotional, and humanistic aspects of forgiveness that had not been extensively analyzed in previous literature.

The sources of secondary data involved journal articles and books that discussed forgiveness, virtue ethics, and human moral development. Secondary data were gathered through a comprehensive review of theoretical literature related to forgiveness and virtue ethics.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which enabled the identification of recurring patterns, conceptual linkages, and interpretive insights. Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring that all sources were properly cited and acknowledged. The study also maintained academic integrity by faithfully representing authors' ideas and avoiding any form of misinterpretation or plagiarism.

Thematic Analysis

The reviews of theoretical literature on forgiveness reveals several interconnected themes that collectively underscore its significance as a moral, psychological, and social virtue. This article has identified the following major themes related to forgiveness:

Forgiveness as a Moral and Ethical Virtue:

Across philosophical and religious traditions, forgiveness emerges as a foundational moral act that transcends individual emotion and reflects deep ethical responsibility. The literature portrays forgiveness as a virtue rooted in moral reasoning and spiritual practice (Tirrell, 2022; Pettigrove, 2023), framed as both a divine command in Christianity and a path to liberation in Buddhism. This theme highlights forgiveness as more than a personal reaction—it is presented as a deliberate moral choice that nurtures compassion, humanity, and spiritual growth.

Psychological Benefits and Emotional

Regulation: A dominant theme across studies is the psychological value of forgiveness. Scholars consistently demonstrate that forgiveness reduces anger, rumination, revenge-seeking tendencies, and emotional distress, while enhancing resilience, self-acceptance, happiness, and overall life satisfaction. Forgiveness functions as a mechanism for emotional regulation, enabling individuals to down-regulate negative affect and alleviate stress (Witvliet et al., 2023; Ho et al., 2023).

Interpersonal Healing and Relationship

Restoration: Forgiveness plays a transformative role in interpersonal

relationships by fostering reconciliation, rebuilding trust, and strengthening social bonds (Cheng et al., 2021; Saleem & Sitwat, 2025). Research shows that forgiveness repairs disruptions in families, friendships, workplaces, and communities, turning conflicts into opportunities for growth and deeper understanding. This theme foregrounds forgiveness as a relational virtue essential for harmony, cohesion, and mutual support within social groups.

Forgiveness as a Social and Cultural Tool for Harmony: Beyond individual relationships, forgiveness is shown to promote social unity and community resilience (Ho & Worthington 2020; Kurniati et al., 2020). Studies also reveal that gratitude, love, and forgiveness together contribute to overall social well-being and the building of compassionate, cooperative communities. Thus, forgiveness emerges as a vital social process with potential to address broader cultural tensions and support peaceful coexistence.

Developmental, Gender, and Spiritual Dimensions of Forgiveness: Several studies emphasize the developmental nature of forgiveness, noting that the capacity to forgive tends to increase with age and is shaped by personal experience and maturity. Gender-based patterns also appear, with women often finding strength in forgiving others, while men experience self-benefit from self-forgiveness. Spirituality further enhances the psychological outcomes associated with forgiveness, suggesting that spiritual beliefs and practices reinforce the capacity to forgive and the

benefits derived from it (Long et al., 2020; Ramírez-- Jiménez & Serra- Desfilis, 2020).

Forgiveness as a Multi-Stage Transformational Process: The literature conceptualizes forgiveness not as a singular act but as a gradual, multi-stage process involving uncovering emotional pain, making a conscious decision to forgive, engaging in cognitive and emotional work, and ultimately achieving deeper personal transformation (Esmail et al., 2021; Skalski et al., 2024). This thematic pattern highlights the complexity of forgiveness and recognizes it as ongoing inner work that cultivates empathy, compassion, creativity, and meaning.

Forgiveness as an Imperative for a Compassionate Future: The literature concludes that as societies face increasing fragmentation and emotional stress, forgiveness gains urgency as a transformative virtue. Scholars argue that understanding and promoting forgiveness is essential for fostering empathy, compassion, and global harmony (Erskine, 2020; Kausar & Afaq, 2024). This theme underscores the relevance of forgiveness in addressing modern challenges and calls for further research exploring culturally diverse practices that cultivate forgiveness as a tool for peaceful coexistence.

Forgiveness as a Catalyst for Personal Growth: **A recurring theme is the role of forgiveness in fostering personal development. The process of forgiving enhances self-esteem, nurtures emotional maturity, and strengthens a sense of inner resilience (Kravchuk, 2021; Mullen et al., 2023).**

Scholars note that forgiveness helps individuals navigate complex emotions and reinterpret painful experiences constructively, allowing them to move forward without being overwhelmed by negativity. This transformative aspect positions forgiveness as a powerful means for personal empowerment.

Conclusion

Forgiveness is a virtue that holds immense potential for personal and societal growth. Acknowledging and embracing forgiveness as an indispensable aspect of human nature can pave the way for a more compassionate and harmonious world. Through a concerted effort to understand, promote, and practice forgiveness, mankind can tap into a powerful force for healing, reconciliation, and overall well-being. Forgiveness emerges as a thread of profound significance, weaving through the complexities of our shared existence. This exploration into forgiveness as an indispensable yet overlooked virtue has illuminated its transformative potential across psychological, interpersonal, and societal realms. From a

psychological perspective, forgiveness transcends mere benevolence; it becomes a liberating force. The journey of letting go of resentment and animosity unfolds as a path to mental well-being, with empirical evidence affirming its positive impact on stress reduction and overall life satisfaction. Interpersonal relationships, often marred by conflicts, find redemption in forgiveness. It acts as a potent glue, binding individuals together and offering a path to resolution and growth. On a societal scale, forgiveness reveals itself as a cornerstone for collective healing. However, challenges persist, and the justice-oriented paradigm often overshadows forgiveness in the societal discourse. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, the cultivation and acknowledgment of forgiveness emerge as imperative. The threads of forgiveness, though at times overshadowed, weave a fabric of compassion, understanding, and unity. To overlook forgiveness is to neglect a virtue capable of healing wounds, bridging divides, and fostering a world where the transformative power of forgiveness is celebrated, not disregarded. In embracing forgiveness, humanity holds a key to unlocking a future marked by empathy, reconciliation, and a deeper understanding of our shared humanity.

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